



Tropentag, October 11-13, 2006, Bonn

“Prosperity and Poverty in a Globalised World—
Challenges for Agricultural Research”

Diversification of Livelihood Strategies of Households in Selected Communal Areas in Namibia

UTE SCHNEIDERAT¹, MARIANNA SIEGMUND-SCHULTZE², JÖRG STEINBACH¹

¹*Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, Department of Livestock Ecology, Germany*

²*University of Hohenheim, Animal Breeding and Husbandry in the Tropics and Subtropics, Germany*

Abstract

Livelihoods of rural households in communal areas in Namibia are constrained by low rainfall amounts, high rainfall variability and low soil fertility. Thus, neither agricultural intensification is an option for livelihood improvement, nor land expansion, which is restricted by the land tenure system. Adequate range management of current resources is actually hampered by changes in access to land because of the weakened control function of traditional leaders. Additionally, the reduction of state subsidies increased the cash demand in Namibian rural areas. Under those conditions, diversification of activities is a strategy to cope with a temporary crisis, minimising risks, and helping to maintain livelihoods in uncertain environments. Embedded within the Biodiversity Monitoring Transect Analysis in Africa (BIOTA-project), this study aims to describe the diverse livelihood strategies of rural communal households in a mixed system in northern Namibia, and two pastoral systems in central and south Namibia. Three community surveys were conducted, covering almost all 70 rural households. Semi-structured questionnaires assessed the productive and socio-economic household situations. Activities of rural households include livestock keeping, crop production, part-time and permanent wage employment, old age pension or other state transfers, social network transfers and small enterprises. Diversification within the agricultural sub-systems covered the keeping of multi-species herds (cattle, goats, sheep, donkeys), or carrying out multi-cropping (millet, sorghum, maize, beans, melons, vegetables). Off-farm incomes, generated via absenteeism (22 % of households) and old age pension payments (48 % of households) were crucial. While livestock keeping was mentioned as the predominant activity by 81 % of the households in the pastoral systems, cattle were hardly ever sold, although about 11 % of the goat flock were sold. In the agro-pastoral system, cattle were sold only in cases of emergency, i.e. yield failure, in order to compensate for food shortage. Infrastructure and the proximity of an urban centre, as well as the harshness of climatic conditions influenced the type of income-sources of these rural households; the education level did not.

Keywords: Communal farming system, diversification, household survey